

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 2592

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SUBJECT: CODEL O'NEILL

SUMMARY: THE APRIL 15-17 VISIT TO SEOUL BY CODEL O'NEILL EXPOSED AN INFLUENTIAL GROUP OF AMERICAN LEGISLATORS TO THE BASIC ISSUES CONCERNING KOREA AND US POLICY TOWARD KOREA. WHILE THE ROKG DID NOT DERIVE FROM THE VISIT THE IMPLICATION OF FULL UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT FOR ITS DOMESTIC POLICIES IT UNDOUBTEDLY HAD HOPED FOR, CODEL LEADER O'NEILL DID GIVE PUBLIC REASSURANCE OF CONTINUING US SUPPORT FOR ROK SECURITY AND MANY CONGRESSMEN PRIVATELY REITERATED THESE ASSURANCES. END SUMMARY.

1. A CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION LED BY HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER THOMAS P. O'NEILL, JR. VISITED SEOUL APRIL 15-17. CODEL CONSISTED OF 22 REPRESENTATIVES, TEN STAFF MEMBERS AND 26 WIVES. VISIT WAS PART OF SERIES OF PARLIAMENTARY EXCHANGE BETWEEN ROK NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND US CONGRESS.

2. CODEL FIRST MET WITH COUNTRY TEAM FOR BRIEFING ON CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS, AFTER WHICH IT FOLLOWED A SCHEDULE ARRANGED BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. CODEL CALLED ON OFFICIAL HOST NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPEAKER CHUNG IL KWON AND ON PRESIDENT PARK CHUNG HEE, WHO AWARDED CONGRESSMAN O'NEILL A KOREAN DECORATION, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE KWANG HWA ORDER OF MERIT FOR DIPLOMATIC SERVICE.

CODEL MEMBERS ALSO HELD DISCUSSION MEETING WITH KEY NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS. SPEAKER CHUNG AND PRIME MINISTER KIM JONG PIL GAVE DINNERS AND CODEL HOSTED LUNCH FOR SPEAKER AND OTHER LEADING KOREANS. IN ADDITION, SOME CODEL MEMBERS RECEIVED UNC MILITARY BRIEFING, SEVERAL VISITED PANMUNJOM, AND OVER HALF ATTENDED MEETING REQUESTED BY GROUP OF AMERICAN MISSIONARIES WHO WISHED TO EXPRESS CONCERN OVER ROK DOMESTIC SITUATION.

3. COUNTRY TEAM BRIEFING FOCUSED LARGELY ON THE REPRESENTATIVES' GENERAL CONCERN OVER ROK DOMESTIC EVENTS. IN LIVELY AND CONSTRUCTIVE EXCHANGE OF VIEWS, AMBASSADOR AND EMBASSY STAFF EXPLAINED US KOREAN POLICY AND DESCRIBED DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS CENTERING AROUND EMERGENCY MEASURES. CODEL DECIDED THAT IN VIEW OF ROKG SENSITIVITY TO CRITICISM OF ITS DOMESTIC POLITICS AND LIKELIHOOD IT WOULD BE ENDEAVORING TO ELICIT ENDORSEMENTS OF SAME, ONLY CONGRESSMAN O'NEILL WOULD MAKE PUBLIC STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS. (THIS DECISION BECAME KNOWN TO KOREAN NEWSPAPERS, WHICH ERRONEOUSLY CONCLUDED THAT IT RESULT OF EMBASSY REQUEST). CODEL DECLINED TO ATTEND MILITARY BRIEFING AT MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE WHICH THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY INSISTED UPON WITHOUT CONSULTING THE CONGRESSMEN.

4. CODEL WAS AWARE THAT ITS PRESENCE IN MIDST OF ROKG CLAMPDOWN ON OPPOSITION PRESENTED RISK THAT ROK SIDE WOULD EXPLOIT VISIT AS WELL AS OPPORTUNITY FOR CODEL TO HAVE FIRST HAND LOOK AT SITUATION. BOTH IN SUBSTANTIVE MEETINGS AND ON SOCIAL OCCASIONS, ROK SIDE GLOSSED OVER DOMESTIC EVENTS AND STRESSED COMMUNIST THREAT, WHILE CODEL USED APPROPRIATE OCCASIONS TO ALLUDE TO AMERICAN PUBLIC CONCERN OVER COURSE OF EVENTS IN KOREA. AT PARLIAMENTARY DISCUSSION MEETING ON LAST DAY, CODEL QUESTIONED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY COUNTERPARTS SHARPLY ON ROK DOMESTIC SCENE, BUT RECIEVED IN REPLY ONLY BLAND REHASHING OF PAST STATEMENTS ABOUT NEED FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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STRONG CENTRAL CONTROL TO WITHSTAND NORTHERN THREAT. A MORE GRAPHIC ANSWER WAS IMPLIED BY THE FACT THAT NO OPPOSTIION ASSEMBLYMEN WERE PERMITTED TO SPEAK DURING TWO HOUR MEETING.

5. IN COURSE OF VISIT, CONGRESSMAN O'NEILL INCLUDED IN TOASTS AND OTHER FORMAL REMARKS OBSERVATION THAT AMERICANS ARE WATCHING DEVELOPMENTS

IN KOREA AND ARE "CONCERNED WITH MEASURES THAT SEEM INCOMPATIBLE WITH A FREE AND OPEN SOCIETY." HE ALSO MADE THIS POINT IN PRIVATE MEETING WITH PRESIDENT PARK.

6. WHILE OPPOSITION MEMBERS WERE SILENT DURING FORMAL JOINT MEETING, CODEL DID HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO TALK WITH NON-GOVERNMENT FIGURES, BOTH IN INDIVIDUAL ENCOUNTERS AND DURING SOCIAL EVENTS. ONE SUCH SESSION WAS APRIL 17 MEETING WITH AMERICAN MISSIONARIES. THIS UNPUBLICIZED MEETING WAS HELD IN EMBASSY AND ATTENDED BY ELEVEN MISSIONARIES, TWO FULBRIGHT SCHOLARS, AND FIFTEEN CONGRESSMEN, INCLUDING CONGRESSMAN O'NEILL. IN RESTRAINED FASHION MISSIONARIES EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERN OVER DOMESTIC KOREAN DEVELOPMENTS AND THE CODEL MEMBERS LISTENED ATTENTIVELY. SUBSEQUENT EXCHANGE OF VIEWS PROVED BENEFICIAL TO MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF ROK SITUATION AND US POLICY TOWARD KOREA.

7. PRESS COVERAGE OF VISIT WAS HEAVY AND GENERALLY UNRESTRICTED. WHILE HEADLINES PREDICTABLY STRESSED ASSURANCES OF US SUPPORT FOR MODERNIZATION PLAN AND ROK POLICY AGAINST NORTH KOREA, ARTICLES ON THE CODEL INCLUDED ACCURATE REPORTING OF CODEL'S QUESTIONS CONCERNING ROK POLITICAL SITUATION AS WELL AS EXCHANGES ON SUBJECT. PRESS ALSO NOTED THAT NO OPPOSITION MEMBERS HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO SPEAK AT JOINT DISCUSSION MEETING. EDITORIALY, MOST PAPERS, PROBABLY WITHOUT ANY PRODDING, ECHOED OFFICIAL ROK PRONOUNCEMENTS ON THE NEED FOR CONTINUING CONFIDENTIAL

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US MILITARY AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT.

8. IN SUM, CODEL ARRIVED IN KOREA WITH EYES OPEN AND THROUGHOUT VISIT MAINTAINED A CIRCUMSPECT APPROACH TO THE KOREAN DOMESTIC POLICY THE KOREANS RECEIVED PUBLIC ASSURANCES OF CONGRESSIONAL ACTION TO COMPLETE MOD PLAN AND TO CONTINUE SUPPORT FOR ROK SECURITY, BUT NO INDICATION THAT US CONGRESS WILL GIVE UNQUALIFIED SUPPORT TO KOREAN REPRESSIVE ACTIONS. FOR ITS PART, THE CODEL GAINED UNDERSTANDING OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN KOREA WHICH HAVE LED TO SITUATION WHICH PERTAINS TODAY. CONGRESSMEN'S CONCERN OVER CENTRALIZATION OF AUTHORITY HERE WAS NOT, HOWEVER, ALLEVIATED BY WHAT THEY HEARD AND SAW. AND THEIR LOW KEY BUT

CLEAR MESSAGE THAT KOREAN DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS
DO AFFECT CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES WAS RECOGNIZED
BY BOTH GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION ASSEMBLYMEN.
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